

After the vicious attacks of 9/11, military installations everywhere tightened down security and started building new entry points. The inevitable effect was that it took a lot longer to get onto the base, so many retirees and others who live off base chose to shop off-post stores instead of their Exchange and Commissary. The good news is that the improved entry points and security upgrades are now almost entirely complete and it is now very fast and easy for retirees and family members to come onto the installation. Processes have been streamlined greatly over the past couple of years.

Your exchange and the greater military community need your support more than ever before. While I hope that you patronize the exchange, at least partly, to benefit today's active duty troops and families, I know your shopping decisions are pragmatic. With this in mind, please remember that independent market basket surveys continue to confirm that the exchange consistently saves authorized customers in excess of 20% on their purchases. This is in addition to the tax free savings you always enjoy at the BX/PX. These factors combined with AAFES' "We'll Match It Program!" ensure that your exchange will not be undersold.

Today, young men and women throughout our country are beginning their journey to becoming professional Soldiers and Airmen. It is not an exaggeration to say that these service members and their families depend on their exchange benefit for more than just tennis shoes and televisions. Sales to authorized customers like you generate funds that are critical to these families' quality of life. In fact, roughly 71 percent of AAFES earnings are paid to Morale, Welfare and Recreation programs. In the past 10 years, \$2.4 billion has been contributed by AAFES' customers to military MWR programs to spend on libraries, sports programs, swimming pools, youth activities, tickets and tour services, bowling centers, hobby shops, music programs, outdoor facilities and unit functions. I wish Congress would provide that money, but it has not, and will not. It is up to us.

Please take some time to visit your local exchange this week. I think you'll find that access to the installation is easier than it has ever been since 9/11. When you go to the store, please take a moment to fill out a "buddy list" form. This new effort delivers information regarding specials and sales, unique to your location, directly to your in-box. It gives you an easy way to communicate directly with your store manager.

AAFES wants to serve you. We are all dedicated to meeting your unique needs, while ensuring that you receive the best value for your dollar. I look forward to seeing you back at the BX/PX as we work together to strengthen the exchange benefit.

Thanks for all you have done for our great country!



PAUL W. ESSEX
Major General, USAF
Commander

